

RECKLESS RALPH'S

DIME NOVEL ROUND-UP

A monthly magazine devoted to the collecting, preservation and literature of the old-time dime and nickel novels, libraries and popular story papers.. Published by RALPH F. CUMMING, Box 75, Fisherville, Mass. U.S.A.

Ad rates: 1¢ per word-25¢ per inch (about 30 words)-Quarter page,\$1.00-Half page,\$1.75-Full page,\$3.00.. Display ads.,50¢ per inch. Four consecutive insertions for price of 3.

VOL.6

NOVEMBER, 1937

NO.68

BLOOD AND THUNDER NOVELS FOR BOYS

By M.Bertrand Couch (Frisco Bert).

Nothing is more exciting than hunting. The love of the chase is inbred in every human being. Even the scene of any sort of a chase in moving pictures, thrills the blood more than any other parts of plot or play. Competition is the spice of life and the matching of wits between hunter and hunted, is exciting indeed. When a rabbit hunter is successful, the fact remains that he has but a few dead rabbits in his bag, which must be disposed of quickly, or they will be a total loss.

But no chase is as exciting, as the hunt for rare books. The search for them calls for all the ingenuity, energy, skill, and intelligence that can be summoned up for the task. But when the chase proves successful, the hunter has no dead rabbits to dispose of quickly, lest they become a pestilence. On the contrary, he has on hand, books that are a constant source of pleasure, and the longer such books are held, the rarer and more valuable they become. So, instead of wasting money on a fleeting pleasure like hunting

rabbits, one can make money by investing in rare books. And the common book of today is oftentimes the rare book of tomorrow. That is where the true skill of the hunter is brought into play, and no bridge game ever played, calls for greater sagacity and shrewdness, than is required in the collection of rare books, and the care of them.

Blood and thunder literature of the Sixties, Seventies, Eighties, Nineties, and even up to 1910, fired the blood of Millions of Americans. These so-called Nickel and Dime Novels swopt America like prairie fire when they appeared on the market. They furnished the main reading matter of millions of Civil War soldiers, as well as the stay-at-homes. Because they were printed as humorously as yesterdays newspapers, no one dreamed they would ever become things of great value, due to their rarity. Fortunately there were some people who held on to their libraries of those old novels, out of sheer affection for them.

There were no aeroplanes, autos, movies, Radios, etc., to provide entertainment for the people. Roads were so bad in most cases, that travel was mainly confined to what was necessary for transacting business. Entertainment was in the home, social gatherings under church auspices, etc. Chaperons were required for all social functions, if conducted correctly. So the Wild West blood and thunder novels for boys, were just as widely read by adults il faux mieux. Fond parents tried to keep little Willie away from these novels, lest he be inspired to run away from home to go West and fight Indians (as the writer himself was inspired to do, and did, at the age of twelve, so far as the running away was concerned). But by hook and crook, the boys got them and hid away to read them in barn

lofts, down by the old swimming hole, under the house, up in trees, and wherever time permitted without interruption. The last whipping in school, for the writer, was for putting a copy of Buffalo Bill inside his large geography, to read during the study hours. He made the sad mistake of not noticing that the geography was upside down, something the vigilant teacher did not miss.

On May 10, 1920, the O'Brien sale of dime novels sharply brought before the collecting world, the fact that this type of publication had gained a definite standing and value. To reach American Book Prices Current with it's \$5.00 minimum, and that through one of the best known auction houses in America, was no small step.

In 1922, the New York Public Library placed on exhibition, a collection of dime novels, presented by Dr. O'Brien. The Library published a catalog of this collection in 1922 which is now out-of-print, and a rarity in itself, selling for about \$5.00 per copy, if, and when found for sale. This writer has two, neither of which is for sale. If the previous sale established them practically and commercially, their exhibition within the classic precincts of the N.Y. Public Library gave them a cultured impetus that certainly did them no harm. Later on, Mr. Pearson wrote his delightful book on DIME NOVELS.

Present day persons who did not read the old novels in their heyday, are apt to view them from two extremes, and to some of us, either extreme is a wrong conception. On the one hand, they have been cried down as trash. On the other hand, many have waxed lyrical in singing their praises, even to the point of picturing the tears of joy that course down the mutton chops of a dignified bank president, as he clutches some cherished

paperback to his chest. O.O. McIntyre recently stated in his syndicated column that a member of the Vanderbilt family, an ex-Premier of Canada, and many other as prominent and wealthy, now collect these items for their historical value. We collectors know many such prominent persons and correspond with them, and we buy, sell and exchange among ourselves, but do not pass along each others names because invariably that results in a mass of crackpot mail from people looking for autographs of the famous upon the replies to that crackpot mail. These old dime novels are the bond that imparts the common touch to financial kings and wage-earners to a degree that is a story in itself, and so, must be passed over here, for lack of space. It can be mentioned here, though, that Franklin Delano Roosevelt, President of the United States of America, is a dime novel collector. Crackpot mail never reaches him, because he has a battery of secretaries who sort his mail, eliminating all but that of importance.

The value of these novels is really midway between the above two extreme points of view. They form perhaps, the only distinctive contribution America has made to the field of literature. America has its quota of poets, novelists, essayists, and historians, and so have all countries of the world, but when the scout on the first page of the first dime novel, spat absentmindedly, as he casually raised his trusty rifle, sometimes fondly called "Old Betsy", and bored the first red-skin, the shot was fired that was heard 'round the world of literature, and announced the birth of an original contribution to the field of letters. (In my own collection, are reprints of these "bloods" printed in England, where they are known as "penny dreadfuls", in France, in Greece, in the respective

ERASTUS BEADLE, father of dime novels, who did so much to perpetuate and glorify in print, the deeds of the American pioneers, was born in the village of Pierstown, Otsego County, N.Y., Sept. 11, 1821. His desire to record some of America's history while it was fresh in the minds of men, was doubtless inspired by the deeds of his own grandfather, Benjamin Beadle, of Weathersfield, Conn., who fought in the Revolution under Gen. John Sullivan, and Gen. George Clinton. Four generations of Benjamin Beadle's ancestors were born in, or identified with Salem, Mass., where Samuel Beadle died in 1664, 24 years after this writer's own ancestors landed in New Haven, Conn., from Cornwall, England. Descendants of Samuel fought in the French and Indian Wars. Benjamin Beadle, the Revolutionary soldier, removed to New York in 1796. He travelled by sail-boat from Conn., to N.Y. City; thence up the Hudson to Lansingburg; and by horse and wagon overland thru the wilderness to Otsego County, on Stewart's Patent, near the present Richfield Springs. This pioneer married three times and sired 23 children. The father of ERASTUS BEADLE was Flavel Beadle, son of Benjamin's second wife. Flavel was eight years of age during the journey to the N.Y. Wilderness, and was there later married to Polly Tuller, who had come from Massachusetts.

In 1833, when Erastus was twelve, he in his turn, was to enjoy his first extensive experience of wilderness journeying. He accompanied the rest of the family on an overland migration to the town of Schoolcraft, in Kalamazoo County, Michigan Territory, which pilgrimage occupied many weeks. But the far west of those days did not suit Flavel and he brought his family back to N.Y. about two years later.

As a boy, Erastus Boadle worked on a farm, and as apprentice to a miller. It was while he was an apprentice that he laid the foundation of his future career as a printer. Need arose in the mill one day for some letters to be used in labelling the bags of grain. Erastus cut the letters from blocks of hardwood, just as the old block-letters had been made in the days before Guttenberg. He then left the mill, and with an alphabet of his home-made wooden type, he travelled about the region, stamping bags in various mills and similarly marking lap robes, wagons and other things.

On reaching Cooperstown, he came to the attention of Elihu Phinney, the pioneer printer of that town, who offered him work. In Phinney's establishment, Erastus learned to be a typesetter, stereotypor, printer, and binder, and with those abilities as his only capital, he moved to the village of Buffalo, N.Y., in 1847. By 1852 he had a printing shop of his own, and in that year, began to issue the excellent magazine called, "The Home Monthly", and two years later, he removed to N.Y. City, to test his great idea.

This plan was to issue "Dime" publications, and possibly had its immediate origin in the unusual success in Buffalo, of a "Dime Song Book" in which he had assembled a number of the penny lyrics of the period. These had been earlier issued in separate broadsides by various publishers.

The New York issues of the song books also made an immediate hit and were swiftly followed by a number of miscellaneous handbooks. Then, in the summer of 1860, came the first of the original "Dime Novels" in their orange covers. Success was assured from the start, and the publishing activities of Boadle and Company, speedily grew to vast proportions.

Many of the best writers of the period, who

possessed intimate knowledge of American pioneer life, were asked to put the conditions and events of earlier generations into attractive form. Among those whose help was thus enlisted, were: Judge Jared Hall-Francis Fuller Barritt-John Neal-Mayne Reid- Mrs. Victor-Col. A. J. H. Duganne-Edward S. Ellis- William Eystor-Ann Stephens-Judge William Busteed-N.C. Iron-Herrick Johnstone-James L. Bowon-Mary Denison-John Warner-Chas. Dunning Clark-and many others.

The little novels they wrote, were inspired by Erastus Beadle, and his influence is seen in the fact that every phase of pioneer life and every historic event in which his own ancestors had taken part, is treated in the series of Beadle books.

The editorship of the firm was entrusted to Orville J. Victor, one of the most remarkable figures in the history of American literature. For thirty years, Victor personally studied, passed up, and edited the thousands of publications of the House of Beadle. First of all, he insisted that the narratives must be true and accurate portrayals, in spirit, of the pioneer times and people with which they dealt. They had to reveal wilderness life and struggle, as it was, and depict the conditions amid which the pioneers did their work. These tales were not history in the literal or text-book sense, since they often incorporate incidents for which there was no authentic or contemporary proof. But such material, if used, had to be consistent with known conditions of the period portrayed. For this reason, the literati of today have come to recognize these "bloods" as Americana of gem quality.

Doubtless, it was the mass realization of these facts, on the part of the reading public, that brought about such recognition of

the so-called "Dime Novels". People were absorbingly interested in the earlier life of the pioneers, and when it was presented to them in the form inspired by Beadle and directed by Victor, they "ate it up" as the users of slang would express it. Doubtless, they intuitively felt, "here at last is the real thing, not set before us as a full task to memorize, but as a vital picture, to be studied and enjoyed, and from which we may learn."

Then came the Civil War, and the soldiers literally absorbed the convenient little books, by the million. The volumes were exchanged, passed from hand to hand, read to tatters, and then thrown away. Throughout the thirty years or more in which the Beadle books held ascendancy, they were so cheap, and so common, that they were almost never saved, any more than the readers hereof save last month's newspapers. In that respect, they suffered the fate of all common things. It is almost always the case, that the commonest objects of one generation, become the rarest objects of two generations afterward. Their very commonness is the quality that keeps them from being treasured by their original possessors. Hence they disappear. Beadle books, in their day, were as countless as the bison, or the passenger pigeon of the air. Yet today, only a few buffalo remain alive, and are carefully protected, bringing high prices when sold; while not one passenger pigeon is known to exist.

After the Civil War--to a much greater extent than before that struggle, Beadle and Victor turned their attention to the Far West and enlisted the aid of numerous western explorers, Indian fighters, and plainsmen, in portraying that part of the country.

Tristus Beadle, himself, made a trip across

of recent times, were inexorably shut out from their progenitors of Beadle's days.

These tales incited a love of reading among the youth of the country. Many of the boys and girls who encountered Pontiac-Mad Anthony-Boone-the renegade Girty-Kenton-and Black Hawk, in their pages, were incited to find out something more about those characters and their times, and thus were introduced to much of the nation's story and geography. Manliness and womanliness among the readers were cultivated by these little books, not by homilies, but by example. It can be truthfully said that the taste and tone of the life, of the generation that grew up with these tales were improved by them. No age limit was set up among Beadle's readers. Abraham Lincoln was one of them.

When Lincoln sent Henry Ward Beecher to England as a Special Commissioner, to win support for the Union from the English Cabinet, it was Victor, editor of the House of Beadle, whose "Address to the English People" gave material aid to the President's representative. After Beecher had returned, he discussed these things with Victor, and said to him: "Your little book and Mrs. Victor's novel, 'Maun Guinea' were a telling series of shots in the right spot."

It was Victor, also, who wrote the life of Lincoln included in the "Lives of Great Americans" series, and who, in his hastily composed memorial preface to that volume, summarized the dead President in a manner, not excelled by any other writer of the period. Therein, Victor said: "Few men realize the magnitude of his task--It was too mighty for comprehension; few men were dispassionate enough to judge justly; few were wise enough to judge understandingly." Such was the man who, under the guidance of

Erastus Beadle, chose and edited the pioneer literature, which for a generation, moulded the thought and ambitions of America's youth. That literature, itself, has almost disappeared but its effect on the national life are still present everywhere. Like the ripples of water widening out until the human eye finds it impossible to see exactly when the ripples ceases movement, when a stone is tossed into the bosom of a placid pond; just so has the effect of those books rippled through the blood of Americans, and none can over measure exactly, the extent of that effect. But very definitely, the books were, and are, the distinctive contribution of America, to the world field of literature.

If sufficient reader interest in this article is manifested to the publisher of this magazine, the subject of dime novels will be treated further in a later issue, to afford readers, reference material for further use.

-----***-----

GOOD NEWS OF THE MONTH.

On Sept. 5, 1937, N.B.C. staged Jerry Bolchor's "OUR NEIGHBORS" program. Nearly half of the half-hour was devoted to an interview with Frisco Bert Couch, on the subject of Dime Novels, and his collection in particular. Some excerpts were read from copies of Beadle and Adams "grays", wild and wooly stuff. Mr. Bolchor was made an honorary member of the Mystic Brotherhood of the Wild and Woolly West, with the nickname, JUMPING JERRY, THE GAMECOCK FROM SUNDOWN. A Beadle and Adams of that title, was framed in a very handsome manner, and was presented to Mr. Bolchor, by Frisco Bert. The back of the frame was hinged and was a handsome hand-carved and hand-painted plaque, depicting THE OREGON TRAIL, a covered wagon train going west. On the inside of the plaque, burned into the wood, was the

certificate of honorary membership, signed by Frisco Bert, and countersigned by Chief Long Pino, an Ogalalla Sioux, the only grandson of old Chief Red Cloud.

Now to tell you about your editor's 2nd trip to old Boston, and other places of interest. Went to Boston Sept. 18-23. Billy Bonners visited Don Learnard at his home in Melrose, to see his very nice collection of books. Then Don took us up to Lawrence to see Ralph P. Smith; here we saw another nice collection and a nice lot of English novels and story papers too. Don drove us back to Melrose and we want to thank him very much for his kindness. Next day we visited Rowley to see the John H. Whitson collection. John Whitson was an old writer for Beadle and Adams, using both his own name, and that of Lieut. A.K. Sims. The latter, he used more than his own. He wrote for other novels, also.

I came home the 23rd, and the 28th was back in Boston with Uncle Billy once more. The 29th found us on the way to New York, where our stay was very limited. There was so much to be seen and so little time to see it in. We went out to see Charlie Bragin and his collection, but he was away and we were out of luck. We landed in Philadelphia the night of the 30th. Oct. 1st, I began to get a real nice thrill at what was to come before very long. First of all, Ed Smeltzer came over to Billy's house and paid us a visit. In the afternoon we went up to see Charlie Austin and his collection. On account of Mrs. Austin being so sick, we did not stop very long. Too bad we did not have time to see all of Charlie's novels and story papers. That night, Bob Smeltzer paid us a very delightful visit.

Saturday, after making the rounds of the the city, and visiting some of the old book stores, we went up to Billy's house where I

received the surprise of my life. I did not think there could be so many novels and story papers in one fellow's collection.

Gee Whiz ! it made my own collection look sick, by comparison.

Some day, I'll have a nice big article on William J. Benners' collection, as I see them.

I started for home at 8 bells in the morning, and did not land there until 11 that night. Some ride, believe me !

Hope all you fellows saw the "smash article" in the September 19th issue of the New York Times Magazine. If not, better send 10¢ to the Times and get a copy.

There's a full two and a half page write-up of Prof. Johannsons

Also a write-up of Prof. Johannsons in the Chicago Daily News, for September 24th, too.

By the way that interview by Mr. Jerry Beichor with Frisco Bert, was from in San Francisco on a long wave band, and was re-broadcast on short wave from New York City, and from there went all over the world.

NOTE FROM THE REPRINTER.

In the original issue, W.M. Burns reported on the increase in membership in Happy Hours Brotherhood, and the return of former members to the fold.

He also explained some changes in the policy of the Round-up, and urged ALL former members to come back and help keep the Roundup going.